R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 019 279 TE 000 430

SHOPTALK--A COLUMN OF BRIEF TECHNIQUES, IDEAS, GIMMICKS, AND SUNDRY THOUGHTS ABOUT THE TEACHING OF POETRY.

BY- DONELSON, KENNETH L., ED.

PUB DATE OCT 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.24 4P.

DESCRIPTORS- *INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS, *LITERATURE APPRECIATION, *POETRY, *TEACHING TECHNIQUES, *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, AUDIOVISUAL AIDS, PICTORIAL STIMULI, MUSIC, RESOURCE MATERIALS, STUDENT ATTITUDES, SECONDARY EDUCATION,

IDEAS FOR THE TEACHING OF POETRY ARE PRESENTED THROUGH SEVERAL BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF 16 SUCCESSFULLY-USED TECHNIQUES. THESE INCLUDE (1) TEACHING RUPERT BROOKE'S "THE GREAT LOVER" IN CONJUNCTION WITH CHARLES SCHULTZ' "HAPPINESS IS A WARM PUPPY," (2) USING PICTURES AND MUSIC WITH POETRY, (3) DISCUSSING PHRASES PECULIAR TO SPORTS TO LEAD INTO A DISCUSSION OF IMAGERY, (4) ASSIGNING BRIEF COMPOSITIONS ON THE NATURE OF POETRY, (5) RECORDING POEMS READ BY THE STUDENTS, AND (6) INTRODUCING STUDENTS TO COMPUTER-WRITTEN POETRY. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE "ARIZONA ENGLISH BULLETIN," VOL. 10 (OCTOBER 1967), 22-4. (MM)

ED019279

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

TE 000 430

ARIZONA ENGLISH bulletin

Volume 10 - - - Number 1

October 1967

SHOPTALK: A Column of Brief Techniques, Ideas, Gimmicks, and Sundry Thoughts About the Teaching of Poetry.

Discovering that students often paused at the end of lines whether a pause was called for or not, Keith Burgess (a junior high teacher in Milwaukee, Wisconsin) wrote the following poem on the board and read it aloud to his class, pausing after each line.

> Professor Polk was a lazy man
> Who liked to sleep in a frying pan
> He cooked his meals with a microscope
> He captured germs with a piece of rope
> He tied his dog to a butterfly
> He wrote a verse called "You and I".

Burgess followed the reading with a discussion of the way the poem could be read (the punctuated reading proved more intelligible, if less amusing). The exercise was used in conjunction with a class reading and discussion of e. e. cummings' "next to of course god america i," but it might prove helpful for other classes plagued with the "stop at the end of every line--any line" disease. (Incidentally, the poem does make sense with punctuation.)

Computer written poetry might make a good introduction to poetry, helpful in establishing the difference between random words in reasonably acceptable syntax and words carefully ordered for meaning and tone. Mrs. Dorothy Louise Robertson (Placerita Junior High School, Newhall, California) used the computer produced poetry in "A New American Poet Speaks: The Works of A. B.," HORIZON, May 1962, notably the poems "Whales," "Kites," "Girls," and "Untitled."

Rupert Brooke's "The Great Lover," a poem often overused or badly taught in the schools, might be worth using in conjunction with Charles Schultz' HAPPINESS IS A WARM PUPPY. Mrs. Barbara Nielsen (Mesa High School) brought the two works together by reading and discussing the Brooke poem and then asking students to use Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, and the other immortals' words to define happiness or some things I have loved. As Mrs. Nielsen said, "Remember that happiness is not a Honda. It is the smell, or the feel, or the sound, or the appearance of the Honda. Take one small part to symbolize the whole object, and describe that one part well."

Mrs. Suzi Clarke (student teacher at ASU) taught Robinson Jeffers' "Shine Perishing Republic" with a series of pictures, showing various facets of America, good and bad. The poem could easily serve as an introduction to a unit on the American Dream. MAD Magazine, in the September 1967 issue, (number 113) did a nasty takeoff on the American Dream by printing the words to "America, the Beautiful," next to some revolting pictures of what America can be and has too often been.

The use of pictures and music with poetry can often be most effective, as demonstrated by Richard Cantor (Alhambra High School) who taught Emily Dickinson's "Where Ships of Purple Gently Toss" as suggested by Laurence Perrine (ENGLISH JOURNAL, Sept. 1962), and then followed the reading and discussion with some slides showing a New York City sunset filled with "fantastic sailors" and "seas of daffodil". Music by Ferde Grofe or Frederick Delius could wisely and easily accompany such pictures.

Abraham Ponemon ("For Tomorrow, Write an Analysis," ENGLISH JOURNAL, Oct. 1965) preceded a class assignment in poetic analysis by writing one himself. Ponemon felt that he could thus evaluate his own assignment, that he could establish the need for careful reading of the text, and that he could make clear to the class the need for supporting details for any assertion he would make. (The idea that a teacher should write his own assignments before giving them to a class is excellent and should prove vastly unpopular with the mass of English teachers. Testing the validity of assignments and establishing the literacy and taste of the teacher to his class, a literacy and taste usually assumed and rarely proved, seems visionary but wholly logical; ergo, unlikely and unpopular.)

Edward Herbert ("On the Teaching of Poetry," ENGLISH JOURNAL, April 1965) led the class from a discussion of baseball to poetry by asking for baseball phrases that had become a part of normal speech (he's in there pitching, he had two strikes on him) and later for other sports terms (she's a knockout, he had to throw in the towel). Asking the students to explain these terms led to paraphrase and student awareness that paraphrase was less concrete and dramatic than the original. This led naturally into a discussion of imagery in general, and finally imagery in poetry. (The poetry of Robert Francis, often dealing with baseball, might be valuable as an introduction to poetry).

Elizabeth Rose ("Teaching Poetry in the Junior High School," ENGLISH JOURNAL, Dec. 1957) suggested that many students feel unable or unwilling to write a poem. Hence, she asked students to list a word that was suggestive to them (winter, wind, rain, spring) and then add words which suggested the taste, smell, sound, touch, sight of the students. These quickly written words were put together by the teacher, and (with luck) they added up to something remotely akin to Whitman's "I Hear America Singing". Such an exercise might help some students to see the way to writing or understanding a poem.

Charles Rathbone ("Prelude to the Making of a Poem: Finger Exercises," ENGLISH JOURNAL, Dec. 1965) noted that poetry is words singing, the rhythm and roll of lines, and our problem is to make students sensitive to sounds (without further antagonizing students). He asked students to make a list of a dozen words for a category (detergents, girls' names, automotive parts, vegetables, rivers, birds, etc.) and arrange six or seven of the words in an ordered list that was pleasing to the ear (e.g., Eliza, Jennifer, Claudia, Beatrice, Dinah, Kathleen).

Richard Corbin ("Three Days to a Greater Interest in Poems," ENGLISH JOURNAL, March 1957) found a class reluctant to read poetry, especially aloud. He dropped poetry for some time, and then came back with a suggestion that students might like to improve their voices through recording. They read two poems as a group reading, found that the recording was miserable and wanted to know where they had failed. Students eventually decided they had flopped since they didn't know what the poems meant. The teacher stepped in, helped through three days of close study, and then the class re-recorded the poems, this time to their delight since they obviously knew the poems far better and were ready to read them.

When Mrs. Ann McCartney Vosovic discovered some misunderstandings about poetry (and considerable lack of enthusiasm) on the part of her students, Mrs. Vosovic (Sunnydale District of the Santa Clara, California schools) asked each student to write a brief essay concerning such things as what is a poem? what are the subjects of poems? who writes poetry? etc. Mrs. Vosovic

discovered some common misconceptions of her students were these:

1. All poems have a "hidden" meaning.
2. All poems are a spontaneous creation.
3. All poems deal with a suitable poetic subject (trees, flowers, love).
4. All poems have a pronounced rhythm that you beat out with your pencil.
5. All poems have an obvious rhyme scheme (rub, dub, tub, etc.).
6. "All poets are queer."

To bring poetry to her students and to try to break down these stereotyped objections, Mrs. Vosovic used Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est," a brilliantly and viciously satiric comment on the "honor" and "nobility" of war. Other poems that appeal to boys and have considerable poetic merit are Sassoon's "Counterattack," Graves' "Recalling War," Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" or "Protocols," or Manifold's "The Tomb of Lieutenant John Learmonth, AIF."

In a unit on the irony and horror of a man in his contemporary society, Mrs. Joan Driskell (Espanola Junior High School, Espanola, New Mexico) compared and contrasted W. H. Auden's "The Unknown Citizen," with a song by two of the Beatles, John Lennon and Paul McCartney's "Eleanor Rigby". Both poems describe the lonely plight of modern man caught up in an indifferent world. The lack of privacy and the lack of involvement could easily be demonstrated by any teacher who reads TIME, LIFE, HARPERS, or the ATLANTIC.

To battle student indifference to poetry, Craig Mooney (Paradise Valley High School) used the poetry of Robert Francis, especially three poems all dealing with baseball (and all effective and good poems), "The Base Stealer," "Catch," and "Pitcher," all calculated to make believers out of male students who would normally assume that sports are safe from the poet.

Her personal acquaintance with the poet, Rod McKuen, makes his poetry more meaningful and teachable to Becky Rowland (student teacher at ASU). She used McKuen's "The Days of the Dancing" with the record of the poet's reading along with background music to dispell student objection to poetry, usually along the lines of, "What could any poet ever have to say to modern youth?"

Faced with bilingual Spanish speaking students, Richard L. Garcia (Las Vegas, New Mexico, and this year with the ExTFP program at ASU) used rock and roll music as a technique to associate music the students enjoyed with poetry. Garcia noted, "Contemporary music hastens the learning of a subject which many high school students find dull and yawn-provoking."

Although English teachers often begin the study of poetry with humorous poetry, the humorous poetry sometimes goes sour when the humor falls flat. One source of humorous poetry which often works is the Little Willie poems, valid for the teacher and sadistic enough to satisfy any normal teenager.

Willie fell down the elevator
Wasn't found till six days later
Then the neighbors sniffed, "Gee Whiz!
What a spoiled child Willie is."

Dr. Jones fell in the well
And died without a moan.
He should have tended to the sick
And left the well alone.